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ABSTRACT

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Basic color terms from Chinese: semantic analysis, comparison with Hungarian, effects from SLA

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Budapest, 2018

1. Introduction

Color, as a special objective existence of material form, has to be attached to specific objective things, and also relies on the subjective perception of the human. These characteristics mean that color terms function as bridges that connect the objective world and the subjective perception of human beings.

This dissertation intends to investigate the prototypical meanings of basic color terms in Mandarin Chinese, to investigate its non-prototypical extended meanings from corpus, novels, internet and dictionary. Later, through demonstrating the network relationship among its prototypical and non-prototypical meanings this dissertation explicates how the extended meaning interact with one another.

As we all know, there are great differences between ancient Chinese and modern Chinese from grammar to characters. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the semantics of basic color terms in modern Chinese and apply the results and fruits for teaching Chinese as a second language in the international cultural exchange school of Fudan University. This way, this thesis focuses on the basic color terms from modern Chinese instead of ancient Chinese. The semantics that have originated from ancient Chinese and kept in modern Chinese, such as novels and idioms, have been discussed in this thesis.

According to Berlin and Kay's criteria, it is believed that English has all eleven basic color terms: black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, grey, orange, purple and pink. In contrast, the number of basic color terms from Chinese is still a controversial issue. The author is in favor of the proposal made by Ye Jun, who argues for the existence of eight basic color terms in Chinese on the basis of a systematic study. They are black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, grey and purple.

For the study of the specific color words, some scholars have analyzed from the perspective of the coding process that is about how to name a color. While some other scholars have carried out studies through observing the decoding process in semantics. On Chinese color words, most studies have been made in word formation or syntax (the grammatical perspective). Few of the studies have been made to compare Chinese and Hungarian color words. This thesis tries to observe the associative

meaning of Chinese color words from the perspective of semantics. It also tries to describe how these associative meanings are produced and developed. Through interviews and questionnaires, the author tried to compare the similarities and differences of the associative meanings of basic color words in Chinese and Hungarian. Following this, the author tries to generalize the causes of the similarities and differences. While exploring whether the SLA (Chinese as a second language acquisition) affects the associative meaning of the basic color terms for Hungarians.

2. The structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters.

The first chapter serves as an introduction, giving a general impression of the whole thesis and its motivation, objective, scope and methodology.

Chapter two tries to define color from different perceptions, and then reviews previous researches on basic color terms both in Chinese and in Hungarian. In particular, the author summarizes researches on Chinese basic color terms and the disadvantages of semantics.

In order to make further effort to analyze Chinese basic color terms, the author introduces four main methods in theory to produce new meanings from perception of cognition semantics in Chapter three.

Chapter four is the main part of this thesis. First, the author summarizes the properties of the eight basic color categories in Chinese and compares them with other languages. Then the author presents a collection of Chinese words or expressions with basic color terms from corpus, and analyzes each semantic item. The semantics of each Chinese basic color term have been classified in four types: prototype meaning, schematic-related extension meaning, metaphorical extension meaning and metonymic extension meaning. All the semantics are connected with each other and have formed a radical semantic network.

In Chapter five with the whole description in semantics of Chinese basic color words, the author conducted a questionnaire in order to get the differences and

similarities of associative meanings of basic color terms in Chinese and Hungarian. According to frame theory and contrast theory, the differences are more emphasized since it causes misunderstanding. Taking white, black, red, green and yellow as examples, the author explored the causes of the differences. Through this comparison, we have more knowledge of basic color terms in semantics.

In Chapter six, in order to find out whether SLA (Chinese as a second language acquisition) affects the associative meanings of basic color terms, the author conducted questionnaires and interviews among a group of Hungarian students in Fudan University in China. The author explained the effects from SLA from two angles, one is investigating the influence of SLA on how learners use their native color terms, another is evaluating the learning performance of basic color terms in Chinese context. Through data analysis, we have an impression of Hungarians' learning of Chinese basic color words. At the end of Chapter six, the author explains the causes from the aspects of students, teachers and teaching method, and then makes suggestions on teaching strategies to improve students' learning performance.

3. Main content of the thesis

3.1 Semantic analysis

Cognitive semantics defines that language is a cognitive ability. A major aspect of human cognitive ability is the conceptualization of the experience being communicated. Applying this theory into semantic analysis, on the basis of plenty of corpus analysis, the author has classified all semantic items of basic color terms from Chinese into four types: prototype meaning, schematic-related extension meaning, metaphorical extension meaning, and metonymic extension meaning. This thesis tries to prove that all semantic items of basic color terms from Chinese are not isolated but related to each other and developed into a radical network respectively. To be specific, every basic color term from Chinese has a prototype meaning, which is the color itself, and other semantic items are extended meanings motivated by image schema, metaphor and metonymy. All semantic items have formed a coherent system in terms of which we conceptualize.

In Chapter four the author conducted two tests to prove that color is the prototype meaning in basic color terms. In one of them, 42 informants were asked what comes first to their mind at the sight of the character hei (black). In the other test, children's responses were collected regarding what is black. Both of the results show that the semantic item of black color is the prototype of black (hei).

Later, making use of corpus, such as Chinses novels, verse and newspapers, all extended semantic items of Chinese basic color terms are classified into three types. They are schematic-related extension meaning, metaphorical extension meaning and metonymic extension meaning. Based on the semantic analysis, author has drawn a semantic network for each Chinese basic color term. With these 8 radical semantic networks, a clear connection and development between each semantic item with its motivation respectively is present. All the semantic items are not created at random but surrounding in the network.

Being supported by the detailed semantic analysis with plenty of corpus, we have summarized the number of semantic items for each Chinese basic color term as follows.

English	Character	pinyin	Number of semantic items	English	Character	pinyin	Number of semantic items
black	黑	hēi	10	white	白	bái	15
red	红	hóng	17	yellow	黄	huáng	12
green	绿	lǜ	10	blue	蓝	lán	4
grey	灰	huī	10	purple	紫	zǐ	6

Red has the most semantic items and it is the color of stage II in the theory of Berlin & Kay, blue has the least in semantic items, which is on the stage IV. The possible explanation for this is that in Chinese 青 (qing) green is also used as a color word and it undertakes some semantics of 蓝 (lán) blue. Also 蓝 (lán) blue is mixed with 绿 (lǜ) green for a long time. Due to these factors, the development of 蓝 (lán)

blue in semantics is not as well developed as blue in other languages. Accordingly, it has fewer semantic items.

From the semantic network diagram of 8 Chinese basic color terms, we can easily notice that the center is prototype meaning of the color, other semantic items are not isolated nor created at random but surrounding in the network. More specifically, the semantics of basic color terms root deeply from the objective world. Motivated by different cognitive process, more meanings have developed. Take the semantic network of the red color for example, it covers 17 semantic items and indicates the motivations of each semantic items, as well as the connection between the semantic items. We can easily find that although the red has 17 semantic items, each item is not isolated, but interrelated. From the semantic network, the specific motivation is also clearly marked. The following coding was used on the diagram to describe the relationship of semantic items with the basic color red: 'LINK' for schematic-related extension, based on similarity, 'M' stands for metaphorical extension, 'Me' stands for metonymic extension. This offers an overall description of Chinese basic color terms in semantics. The semantic network of eight Chinese basic color terms are present in this thesis. For example, Figure 4.25 shows semantic network of 红 (hóng) red.

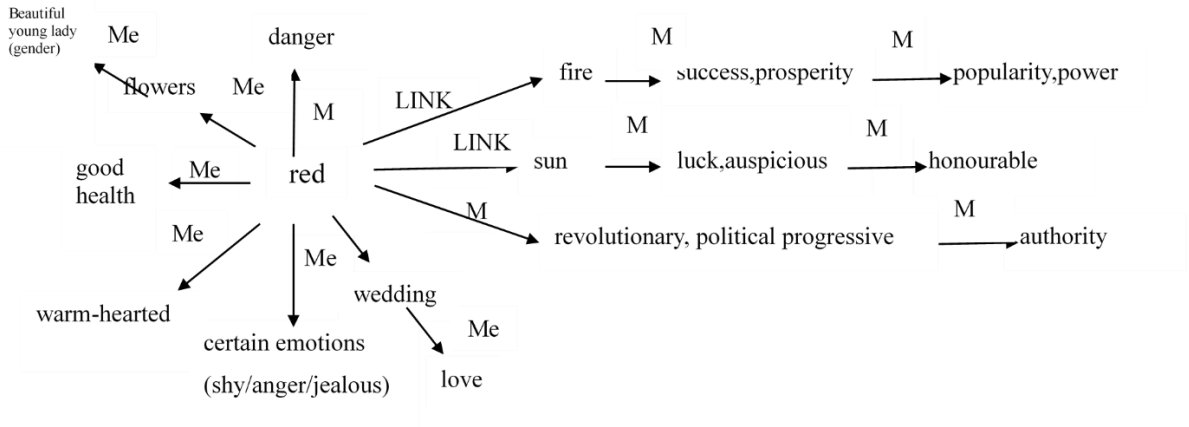

Figure 4.25 shows semantic network of 红 (hóng) red

3.2 Comparison with Hungarian

Besides semantic analysis, comparison is also an effective way to observe

semantics. In Chapter 5, based on the frame theory, which put forward that concepts are related with each other, rather than simply float around randomly in the mind, the author conducted two experiments to collect the associative meanings of basic color terms both in Hungarian and Chinese. The participants were native Chinese living in Beijing and Shanghai without Hungarian learning experience, and native Hungarian living in Budapest.

This dissertation has only concerned itself with five basic color terms for this part: white, black, red, yellow, and green. This is because, on the one hand, they all have fully developed in semantics; on the other hand, the differences are more prominent during comparison. However, this does not imply that there are no other differences, or that other differences are unworthy of exploration. I call for more and deeper exploration in this field.

From the questionnaire, I found that the most popular words related with black from Chinese are funeral (73%), night (40%), coal (36%) and solemnity (30%). Then the most popular words collected from Hungarian are funeral (100%), sadness (100%), grief (50%), depression (33%), and suit (30%). No positive words related were collected. When asked what color is used for bad luck, the color black has the highest support rate in both Chinese and Hungarian. From the answer to question of “what color is used for funeral?” 100% Hungarian connected funeral with black, 66% Chinese stayed with black, but 34% Chinese chose white for funeral instead. In Chinese we found the expressions of “红白二事” meaning red wedding and white funeral.

Red is a more complicated color in terms of meaning. Six salient themes with frequency are collected from Chinese: blood (73%), national flag (53%), revolution (30%), wedding (73%), enthusiasm (53%), joy (53%).

With the help of semantic network in Chapter 4, we are aware that both “danger” and “revolution” are metaphorically mapped from the semantic item of “blood”. However, they have different salience status. “Danger” has only 3% in frequency but “national flag” has 56%, and leads to “revolution” with 30% and “enthusiasm” with

53%. The other semantic development of red-wedding (73%) joy (53%) is also salient.

Six themes were also collected with vörös (red) in Hungarian. They are blood (46%), rose (37%), war (20%), fury (55%), love (48%) and pain (20%).

More than half of Hungarian connected negative emotions such as fury and pain which are driven by metaphors from “blood” with vörös. The semantic chain of vörös-rose (37%)-love (48%) is also salient.

In Figure 5.5 Comparison on associative meaning of red between Chinese and Hungarian, five themes have shown the biggest difference between Hungarian and Chinese. They are wedding, sun, fury, luck and jealousy.

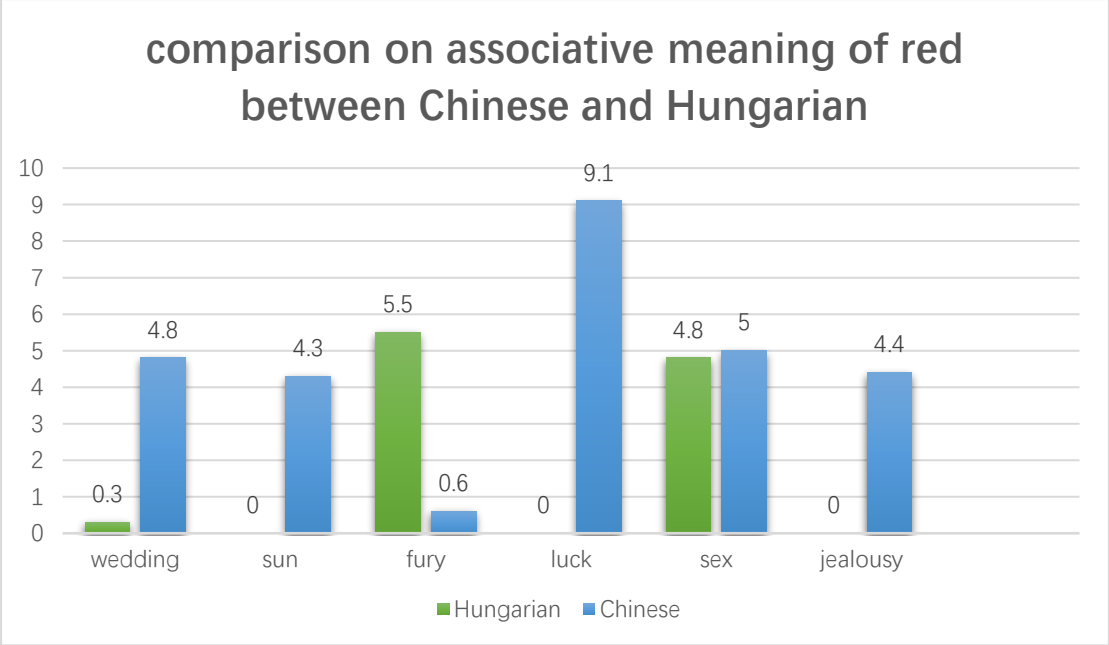

Figure 5.5 Comparison on associative meaning of red between Chinese and Hungarian

Although 48% Hungarian admitted vörös symbolizes love, only 3% of them chose red wedding while 88% chose white. No Hungarian associated red color with the sun, but 43% Chinese voted for red in connection with the sun. 88% Hungarian chose yellow as a color for the sun. 91% Chinese took red as luck, but no Hungarian thought the same. 44% Chinese connected red with jealous, while no Hungarian connected red with jealousy, but many accepted yellow for it.

It is also explained in the dissertation that influences from religion, customs living area, culture, and translation of other languages cause differences mentioned

above. From the data analysis and explanation, I have drawn conclusions as followed:
(a)These semantic development lines exist in both Chinese and Hungarian: black-negative emotion, red-blood-danger, and red-anger;
(b)They have different salience status in the two different languages. For example, Chinese use both black and white for funeral; red is the very positive color in Chinese. It is so positive that the negative semantic feature is strongly weakened, but in Hungarian no evidence shows this trend;

3.3 Effects from SLA

In order to make sure whether and how the SLA (Chinese as a second language acquisition) affect the associative meanings of the basic color terms, taking a group of Hungarian students as the study object, who have studied Chinese at Fudan university in China in 2016, author has conducted two experiments.

The first study aims at investigating the influence of SLA on how learners use their native color terms. Data are collected from three groups. Group A consists of seven Hungarian students learning Chinese at Fudan University. Group B has native Hungarian (control group) speakers without any Chinese learning experience, while Group C gathers native Chinese speakers without any Hungarian learning experience. With data and analysis, the author has concluded that SLA enlarges the learners' associative meanings on basic color terms in quantity, especially when the connection between the color and meaning is totally new to the learners, such as red-wedding, green is a shame color for a man. However, the Chinese learning experience failed to change the connection that already exist in Hungarian's mind or culture. For example, yellow-jealous, red-negative emotions.

The second survey's aim is to evaluate the learning performance of basic color terms in Chinese context. The average accuracy is as low as 33.7%, far from 60%. (60% of accuracy means passing the exam in China). The best performance is on red and white, whose average score is 47.6%. The accuracy of blue is the lowest, only 14.3%. Author caculated the accuracy of each semantic items and analyzed the learning performance of each Chinese basic color terms.

From the three aspects, which are teachers, students and teaching methods, the author analyzed the causes of this poor performance. Finally, according to the semantics analysis of Chinese basic color words, making use of the inner connections between the semantics, based on teaching experience, the author has put forward the relevant teaching strategies.

I sincerely hope that the fruit and result of this study could make some contributions to teaching Chinese to Hungarians as a foreign language.

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